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**Protestants abroad. How missionaries tried to change the world but changed America. By David A. Hollinger. Pp. xvi + 391 incl. 30 ills. Princeton–Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017. £27.95. 978 0 691 15843 3**

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*Protestants Abroad. How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America.* By David A. Hollinger. Pp. xvi + 391 incl. 30 ill. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017. £27.95. 978 0 691 15843 3

Despite the punchy sub-title, this is not a book about American Protestant missionary work or its supposed failure. Its central characters are instead former missionaries and children of missionaries who went on to play central roles in defining the relationship of the United States to the wider world in the twentieth century. A good number of them are what the author terms ‘post-Protestants’ – those whose Christian-originated liberal humanitarianism eventually took them beyond the community of faith. David Hollinger is not known as a historian of the missionary movement but rather as a distinguished scholar of American intellectual history.

Hollinger’s principal contention – and it is a wholly persuasive one – is that mainline Protestant missions of a broadly liberal kind supplied the cultural spectacles through which a substantial sector of the American political and intellectual establishment came to view Asian peoples from the Levant to Japan, contributing a cosmopolitan and antiracist voice to debates over United States foreign policy, at least in the pre-Vietnam era. Africa, Oceania and Latin America are rather marginal to his story, in part because of their secondary importance to American denominational missions in the twentieth century. However, the substantial neglect of Africa may distort the interpretation to a degree, for many Christians in the early twentieth century who held liberal views of Asian peoples could appear much more racist when they spoke about Africans.

The American Protestant missionary movement – or, more precisely, its progressive and ecumenical wing represented by the denominational mission boards – thus emerges from Hollinger’s narrative as decidedly a good thing, an essentially anticolonial force, despite the fact that Hollinger writes from avowedly secularist perspectives that place him at a considerable distance from the missionary project. Missionaries and missionary supporters of this stamp once formed an integral and respected part of the liberal intellectual elite in Protestant America, strange as this may seem to a postcolonial generation that has come to equate Christian mission with intolerance and intellectual myopia. The mainline missionary movement thus had an

unanticipated ‘boomerang’ effect, stimulating campaigns for racial justice and inclusion within the United States itself: hence the ‘changed America’ of the book’s subtitle. In contrast, the conservative evangelical missions, who by the end of the century far outstripped their mainline denominational counterparts in size and geographical influence, receive only passing attention and a markedly less favourable verdict, being depicted as parochial, illiberal, and imperialistic. British and European missions fall beyond the scope of Hollinger’s analysis, although there is a discernible and consistent tendency to bracket the noun ‘imperialism’ with ‘European’ rather than ‘American’ as an adjective.

The great strength of this book is the skill with which Hollinger traces the many interconnected filaments of the missionary web, extending deep into the inner reaches of the American foreign service and the growing part of the academy concerned with the new disciplines of Asian or ‘area’ studies. The unique linguistic and cultural skills of the array of former missionaries or missionary children whom Hollinger selects for study rendered them invaluable to government and universities, and they brought with them not simply their marketable skills but also their deep convictions about the fundamental unity of humanity and the potential of Asian peoples for cultural and political achievement. He shows convincingly that the China missionary lobby was distinctly unimpressed with Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists and much more sympathetic to the Chinese Communist Party than might be supposed. He also shows that the mainline missions in the Near East (though the judgment certainly does not apply to the conservative evangelical ones) were consistently pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist, with an inclination to be strongly critical of the tendency of United States policy after 1948 to be pro-Israel.

Hollinger is notably less secure in his grasp of the wider international and ecumenical dimensions of the Protestant missionary movement or of more recent developments in evangelical missionary thought. The slogan ‘The Evangelization of the World in This Generation’ was not in fact adopted at the World Missionary Conference in 1910 (24, 85), but at the New York Missionary Conference in 1900; indeed, it was scarcely mentioned at Edinburgh in 1910, having been the subject of severe criticism from Gustav Warneck in the interim. Neither was the International Missionary Council founded in 1910 (82). The Life and Work movement has become Life and Works

(97) and the Dutch mission thinker Hendrik Kraemer has turned into a Swedish divine (73). The Scots Presbyterian John A. Mackay, who is mis-spelt on p. 184 as Mackey, is depicted as a typical ecumenical figure, without noting that this member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches from 1948 to 1954 had been reared in the ultra-conservative Free Presbyterian Church in Inverness and sent as a missionary to Peru in 1916 by the continuing Free Church of Scotland. Lesslie Newbigin would perhaps be surprised to be included in the ranks of the liberal elect (79). The Protestant missionary movement was too complex and diverse a phenomenon to be accurately represented by a simple binary between enlightened liberals and benighted fundamentalists, and the growing adoption by conservatives since the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974 of more holistic approaches to mission cannot be reduced without distortion to mere belated emulation of the liberals, as is suggested on p. 86.

These deficiencies should not be allowed to overshadow the central message of this important, and lavishly illustrated, book. Missionary cosmopolitanism, concludes Hollinger, reduced rather than increased the scope and intensity of Orientalism. Long before Edward Said, scholars and diplomats who, like Said himself, owed their intellectual formation to missionary teachers or parents (or even to their own previous missionary careers), were subverting negative and patronizing images of Asian peoples. Hollinger has added to the accumulating body of evidence that the missionary movement cannot be adequately presented merely as an epiphenomenon of Western colonialism, and that is not an insignificant achievement.

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